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Energy efficiency legislation introduced by Vermont Rep. Peter Welch that cleared the House but floundered in the Senate may find new life after President Barack Obama once again touted it Thursday.

Energy efficiency

The third-term Democratic congressman has authored three separate energy efficiency bills in recent years. The Retrofit for Energy and Environmental Performance (REEP) Program called for increasing energy efficiency 20 percent by retrofitting millions of homes and buildings. It was included in the American Clean Energy and Security Act. The legislation passed the House in July 2009 by on a 219 to 212 vote, but failed to make it through the Senate.

The Home Star Energy Retrofit Act seeks direct incentives to make homes more energy efficient. The bill passed the House in May 2010 with GOP support. A third bill, the Building Star Energy Efficiency Act, would provide rebates and low-interest loans to business owners and apartment building owners who install energy saving materials and products.

Obama expressed support for those goals Thursday in a speech at Penn State University. The president outlined a proposal similar to the Building Star Energy Efficiency Act to improve efficiency in commercial buildings by 20 percent over the next decade. The plan mirrors Welch-authored legislation that would leverage private investment in efficiency by providing support to business owners.

Obama also called on Congress to pass the Home Star Energy Retrofit Act.

"I'm delighted that the president is putting this out as a major initiative, and I'm determined to do everything to pass it even with a Republican Congress," Welch said in a telephone interview.

Welch said he received a promise from the president during a recent Democratic Party retreat that Obama would continue to push for efficiency legislation "He assured me there would be a very aggressive energy agenda and he's following through on his commitment," Welch said.

A large, comprehensive energy bill is no longer possible, Welch said, after the GOP regained majority status in the House following the mid-term election in November. But stand-alone efficiency measures are still possible, he said.

"The efficiency approach on energy is a place where we can find common ground with Republicans. The benefits on moving aggressively ahead on energy on are tremendous," Welch said. "Cap and trade is out of the question with the Republican majority ... but I believe the efficiency argument is the one that has the potential to bring us together."

Welch said he found "strange bedfellows" as he sought support for his legislation. Rep. Joe Barton, a conservative Republican from Texas, was an early supporter. Welch said he will again see Barton's help, as well as other Republicans, to pass an efficiency bill.

"We can save \$40 billion a year on energy bills. To do that we put thousands of construction workers to work on retro-fitting," he said. "This is about creating jobs and saving money and it has an incidental and significant benefit of reducing our carbon footprint."